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**Patentanmeldung Nr.    Patent application No.    Demande de brevet n°**

02254806.9

Der Präsident des Europäischen Patentamts;  
Im Auftrag

For the President of the European Patent Office

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**R C van Dijk**

DEN HAAG, DEN  
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**Blatt 2 der Bescheinigung**  
**Sheet 2 of the certificate**  
**Page 2 de l'attestation**

Anmeldung Nr.:  
Application no.:  
Demande n°: 02254806.9

Anmeldetag:  
Date of filing:  
Date de dépôt: 09/07/02

Anmelder:  
Applicant(s):  
Demandeur(s):  
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Bezeichnung der Erfindung:  
Title of the invention:  
Titre de l'invention:  
Multi-bridge for a plurality of mutually different subnetworks

In Anspruch genommene Priorität(en) / Priority(ies) claimed / Priorité(s) revendiquée(s)

Staat:  
State:  
Pays:  
Tag:  
Date:  
Date:

Aktenzeichen:  
File no.  
Numéro de dépôt:

Internationale Patentklassifikation:  
International Patent classification:  
Classification internationale des brevets:

/

Am Anmeldetag benannte Vertragsstaaten:  
Contracting states designated at date of filing:  
Etats contractants désignés lors du dépôt: AT/BE/CH/CY/DE/DK/ES/FI/FR/GB/GR/IE/IT/LI/LU/MC/NL/PT/SE/TR

Bemerkungen:  
Remarks:  
Remarques:



Title: Multi-bridge for a plurality of mutually different subnetworks

## BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to a multi-bridge for use in a network that contains a plurality of subnetworks.

5 A network of communication links may be split into subnetworks. A physical subnetwork usually is separated from other physical subnetworks for business or security reasons. Each subnetwork comprises a number of bridges and a number of links, such as for instance Ethernet links. Each bridge has a port for each link. Each bridge  
10 is arranged to forward data packets which are received by a port of the bridge either via another port of the bridge to another bridge of the subnetwork, or, if possible, directly to a device with a destination address which is usually connected to one of the bridges. The data packets comprise information related to the destination address, allowing for the  
15 correct forwarding of a data packet by a bridge.

Adjacent subnetworks may share a multi-bridge capable of forwarding data packets to ports for both subnetworks. The multi-bridge comprises for each subnetwork a set of at least two ports. To allow for optimal use of the bandwidth available on a subnetwork, a number of  
20 mutually different and logically segregated Virtual Local Area Networks (VLANs) may make use of the subnetworks.

In a situation where a subnetwork may be used by a number of mutually different VLANs, data packets comprise information that identifies the VLAN over which the data packet is sent. This information is  
25 usually referred to as an identifier (VLAN ID). The multi-bridge is capable of extracting the VLAN ID from a data packet. This will enable the multi-bridge to forward a data packet not only via the correct port, but also via the correct VLAN.

However, the information that identifies the VLANs is preferably  
30 used dynamically. VLANs with a given identifier may stop using one subnetwork and subsequently another VLAN with the same identification

may start using another network. This may for instance be a result of the desire of customers to use another subnetwork.

The identifier of the VLAN is used to determine the ports of the multi-bridge to which the data packets are forwarded. The multi-bridge registers for each VLAN to which ports data packets with the identifier of that VLAN must be forwarded. When a packet is received, the multi-bridge extracts the identifier and forwards the data packet according to the registered ports for that identifier. The temporary nature of a VLAN on a subnetwork has consequences for the forwarding of a data packet. If a data packet comprises information related to the VLAN in which it has to be forwarded, conflicting information may be available to the bridge with regard to the port via which the data packet should be forwarded if an old identifier is used for a newly created VLAN. Therefore the registration must be updated. The update of the registration of a VLAN may take place either manually, costing much time and energy or may take place by carrying out a highly complex protocol such as the GVRP protocol as described in IEEE 802.1q.

Accordingly, it is an object of the invention to provide a multi-bridge for a plurality of mutually different subnetworks wherein the multi-bridge is arranged such that a fast and easy registration of a VLAN on a set of at least two ports for a subnetwork, is possible.

It is a further object of the invention to provide a multi-bridge which is arranged to avoid registration of one VLAN on a plurality of mutually different sets of at least two ports.

It is an even further object of the invention to provide a multi-bridge which is arranged to indicate an undesired regular switching of registration of a VLAN from one set of at least two ports to another set of at least two ports.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with one of the above mentioned objects, the invention provides a multi-bridge for a plurality of mutually different

subnetworks. This multi-bridge comprises for each subnetwork a set of at least two ports. The multi-bridge is arranged to forward a data packet which is sent over a Virtual Local Area Network (VLAN) if the data packet is received by one of the at least two ports of the set on which that VLAN is registered. The multi-bridge is further arranged to register upon receiving a data packet by one of the at least two ports of a set, on each of the at least two ports of that set, if needed, the VLAN over which that data packet is sent. This has the advantage that no extra time and energy consuming work is needed to ensure the registration of a new VLAN on a set of at least two ports. The registration of a VLAN according to the invention comprises a simple and fast action. Use of a complex protocol such as the GVRP protocol is unnecessary.

The registration is strictly speaking only needed if the VLAN over which the data packet is sent has not already been registered on the set of at least two ports out of which by one port the data packet is received. It is however not excluded that the multi-bridge is arranged such that any data packet which is received by one port of a set needs to be registered on that set anyway.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention the multi-bridge is further arranged to de-register on the at least two ports of each set that is different from the set of which one of the at least two ports has received the data packet, if needed, the VLAN over which that data packet is sent.

This avoids multiple registration of a VLAN. The de-registration of the VLAN on a set which is different from the set on which the data packet has been received, occurs before, or at the same time of, the registration of the VLAN.

In accordance with yet another aspect of the invention the multi-bridge is further arranged to provide an alarm signal if within a predetermined time span and by a predetermined number of times one VLAN is successively registered and de-registered on one set. This may for instance occur if after registration of a VLAN on a first set of at least two

ports and de-registration of that VLAN on a second set of at least two ports, a data packet which is send over that VLAN still arrives at the second set of at least two ports. The alarm signal which is then provided according to one aspect of the invention may comprise for instance a  
 5 visual and or audible signal to an operator who can act appropriately .

The invention is further related to a network comprising such a bridge for a plurality of subnetworks.

The invention is also related to a method for allocating a Virtual Local Area Network (VLAN) to one set out of a number of such sets on a  
 10 multi-bridge as described above.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention is further illustrated by the following, non-limiting drawing. Herein shows:

- 15 figure 1 schematically a communication network ;
- figure 2 a flow chart of a first aspect of the method according to the invention;
- figure 3 a flow chart of a second aspect of the method according to the invention; and
- 20 figure 4 a flow chart of a third aspect of the method according to the invention.

Figure 1 shows a communication network with two subnetworks 1 and 2. Subnetwork 1 comprises the bridges B, C and multi-bridge A and links 4.1 between the bridges A, B, C and subnetwork 2 comprises the  
 25 bridges D, E and multi-bridge A and links 4.2 between the bridges A, D, E. In other words, the two subnetworks 1,2 share multi-bridge A. Each bridge B,C of subnetwork 1 has two ports 3.1 for links 4.1 within subnetwork 1. Multi-bridge A has a set s1 of two ports p.1.1, p.1.2 for subnetwork 1. Each bridge D,E of subnetwork 2 has a port 3.2 for each  
 30 link 4.2 within subnetwork 2. Multi-bridge A has a set s.2 of two ports 3.2. for subnetwork 2.



In operation data packets are sent via links 4.1, 4.2 and bridges A,B,C,D,E through the network. The bridges A,B,C,D,E in the network are arranged to support a plurality of Virtual Local Area Networks (VLANs). Each VLAN behaves as an individual network, but the plurality of  
 5 VLAN shares use of the bridges A, B, C, D, E and links 4.1 and 4.2 in the network. Each VLAN is limited to a subnetwork. Each VLAN has its own identifier VLAN ID. When a data packet is sent via a VLAN the identifier VLAN ID is included in the data packet.

Multi-bridge A registers for each identifier ID which subnetwork  
 10 is used by the VLAN that corresponds to that ID. Multi-bridge A is according to the invention arranged to carry out the method as schematically outlined in the flow-chart of figure 2. On receiving at port p.1.1 of the two ports p.1.1, p.1.2 of set s1 on multi-bridge A a data packet comprising a VLAN with identity ID related to the Virtual Local  
 15 Area Network (VLAN) over which it is sent, multi-bridge A checks whether the VLAN ID has been registered in multi-bridge A. If the VLAN ID has been registered the data packet is forwarded to port p.1.2 or ports of the subnetwork that is used by the VLAN that corresponds to the ID (except preferably on the port at which the data packet was received).

20 If multi-bridge A determines that the VLAN ID has not been registered, multi-bridge A registers that the VLAN that corresponds to the VLAN ID from the data packet uses the subnetwork, i.e. the set of ports, that contains the port on which the packet was received, implying that the VLAN ID is registered at port p.1.1 and port p.1.2. The data packet which  
 25 was sent over the VLAN with identifier ID and received at port p.1.1 can then be forwarded by the multi-bridge via the port p.1.2 onto which the VLAN with identifier ID is registered. In another embodiment port p.1.1 does not check whether the VLAN ID has been registered on set s1. In that case the VLAN ID is registered on set s1 anyway, implying that the VLAN  
 30 ID is registered on port p.1.1 and port p1.2. This is shown by the broken line in figure 2

Additionally, multi-bridge A may according to the invention be arranged to carry out the method as schematically outlined in the flow-chart of figure 3. On receiving at one port p.1.1 of the two ports p.1.1, p.1.2 of set s1 on multi-bridge A a data packet comprising a VLAN identity ID related to the Virtual Local Area Network (VLAN) over which it is sent, port p.1.1 may check whether the VLAN ID has been registered at set s2 which is different from set s1. If the VLAN ID has not been registered on set s2, no action is undertaken and the data packet is forwarded to p.1.2. If the VLAN ID has been registered at set s2, the VLAN ID is de-registered on set s2, implying that the VLAN ID is de-registered at port p.2.1 and port p.2.2. It may also be the case that port p.1.1 does not check whether the VLAN ID has been registered on set 2. In that case the VLAN ID is de-registered anyway on set 2, implying that the VLAN ID is de-registered on port p.2.1 and port p.2.2. This is shown by the broken line in fig. 3

The order of checking registration on set s1 and checking registration on set s2 is irrelevant. Checking registration on set s1 and checking on set s2 may also occur simultaneously. The order of registration, if needed, and de-registration, if needed, is always such that de-registration does not take place after registration.

In addition to these methods, bridge A may be arranged to carry out the method as schematically outlined in the flow-chart of figure 4. The number of times each VLAN ID is registered and de-registered on one set of two ports within a predetermined time span is monitored. If this number is higher than a predetermined number an alarm signal is provided to for instance an operator who can act appropriately. This signal may for example be a visual and/or audible signal. Alternatively, for each VLAN the time is monitored in which the VLAN is registered and de-registered on one set of two ports by a predetermined number of times. If this time is shorter than a predetermined time, the alarm signal is provided.

A multi-bridge according to the invention may be arranged such that the forwarding of datapackets is carried out entirely and automatically by the

hardware. The registering and de-registering of a VLAN, which may be seen as instructing the hardware, may be carried out by the software. For those skilled in the art it is relatively simple to develop a multi-bridge according to the invention using known technology.

- 5           All these variations are considered to be within the scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.



Claims

1. Multi-bridge for use in a network that contains a plurality of subnetworks, wherein the multi-bridge comprises for each subnetwork a set of at least two ports, the multi-bridge being arranged to register which of the ports are used by a Virtual Local Area Network (VLAN), wherein the multi-bridge is arranged to forward a data packet which is sent with an identifier that identifies the VLAN to those of the ports that the VLAN is registered to use, wherein the multi-bridge is arranged to register upon receiving a data packet by one of the at least two ports of a particular set, that the VLAN identified by the identifier of the data packet uses the ports of the particular set, at least when the multi-bridge has not yet registered that the VLAN identified by the identifier of the data packet uses the particular set on which the data packet was received.
- 2 Multi-bridge according to claim 1, wherein the multi-bridge is further arranged to de-register on the at least two ports of each set that is different from the set of which one of the at least two ports has received the data packet, if needed, the VLAN over which that data packet is sent.
- 3 Multi-bridge according to claim 2 or 3, wherein the multi-bridge is further arranged to provide an alarm signal if within a predetermined time span and by a predetermined number of times one VLAN is successively registered and de-registered on one set.
- 4 Method for allocating a Virtual Local Area Network (VLAN) to one set out of a number of such sets on a multi-bridge, wherein each set comprises at least two ports for a subnetwork out of a plurality of such subnetworks which share the multi-bridge, wherein the method comprises:
- sending to one of the at least two ports of a set a data packet over a VLAN; and
  - registering the VLAN over which the data packet is send on each of the at least two ports of the set of which one of the at least two ports has received the data packet.

5 Method according to claim 4, characterised in that, the method further comprises:

- de-registering on the at least two ports of each set that is different from the set of which one of the at least two ports has received the data packet, if needed, the VLAN over which that data packet is send.

6 Method according to claim 4 or 5, wherein the method comprises:

providing an alarm signal if within a predetermined time and by a predetermined number of times one VLAN is successively registered and de-registered on one set

7 Network comprising a multi-bridge according to any one of the claims 1,2 or 3.

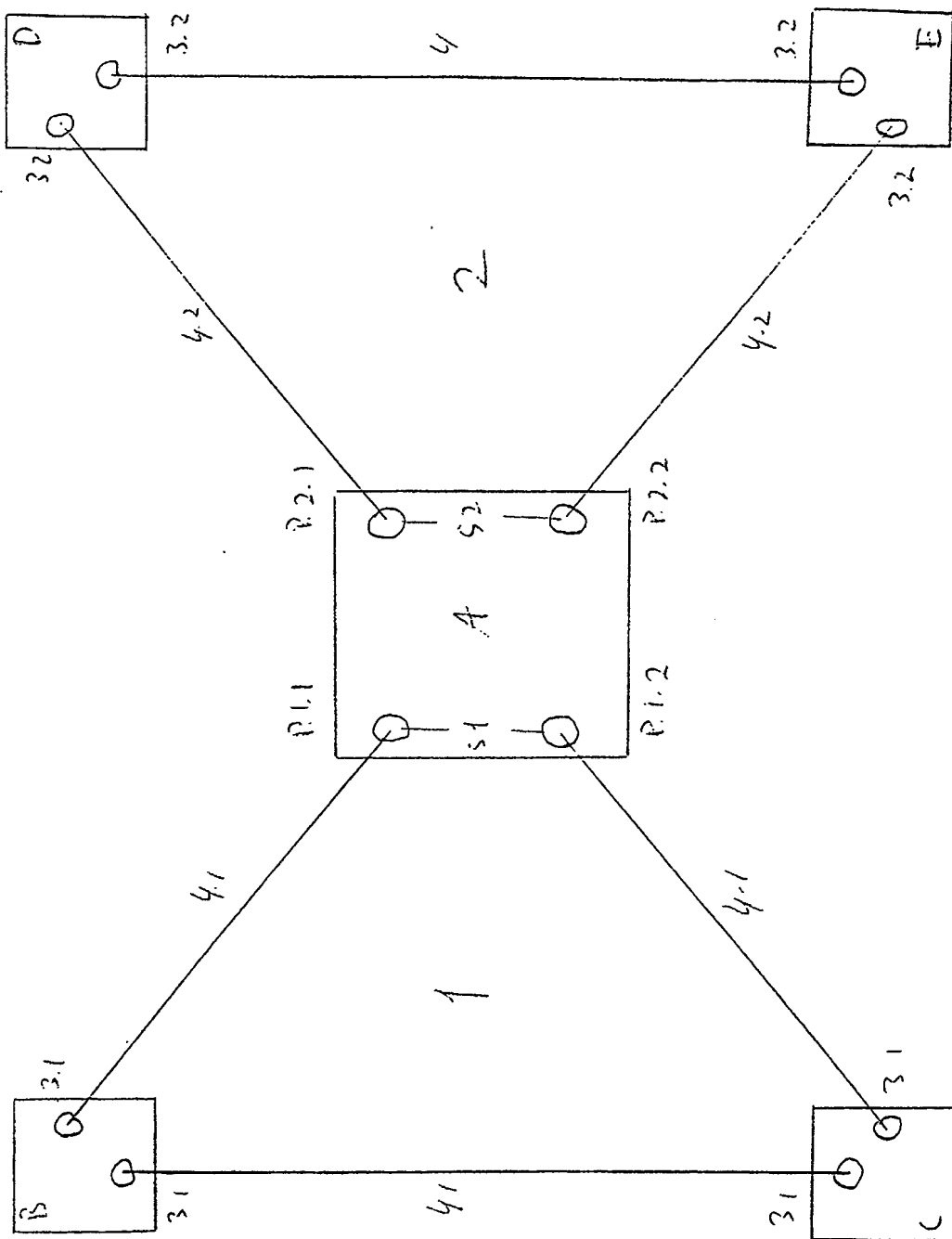
Title: Multi-bridge for a plurality of mutually different subnetworks

Abstract

Multi-bridge for use in a network that contains a plurality of subnetworks, wherein the multi-bridge comprises for each subnetwork a set of at least two ports, the multi-bridge being arranged to register which of the ports are used by a Virtual Local Area Network (VLAN), wherein the multi-bridge is arranged to forward a data packet which is sent with an identifier that identifies the VLAN to those of the ports that the VLAN is registered to use, wherein the multi-bridge is arranged to register upon receiving a data packet by one of the at least two ports of a particular set, that the VLAN identified by the identifier of the data packet uses the ports of the particular set, at least when the multi-bridge has not yet registered that the VLAN identified by the identifier of the data packet uses the particular set on which the data packet was received.







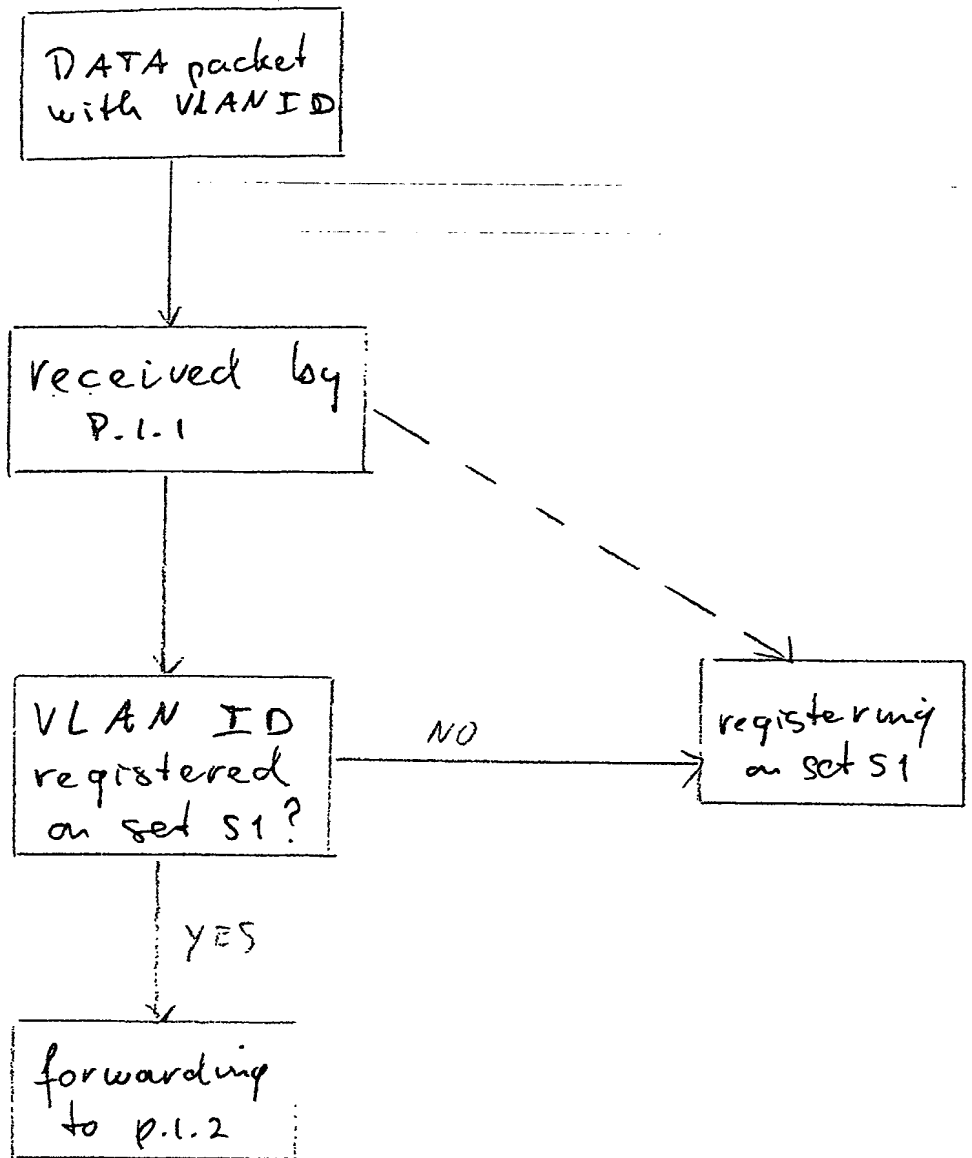


fig. 2